

ALFRED HITCHCOCK'S

mystery magazine

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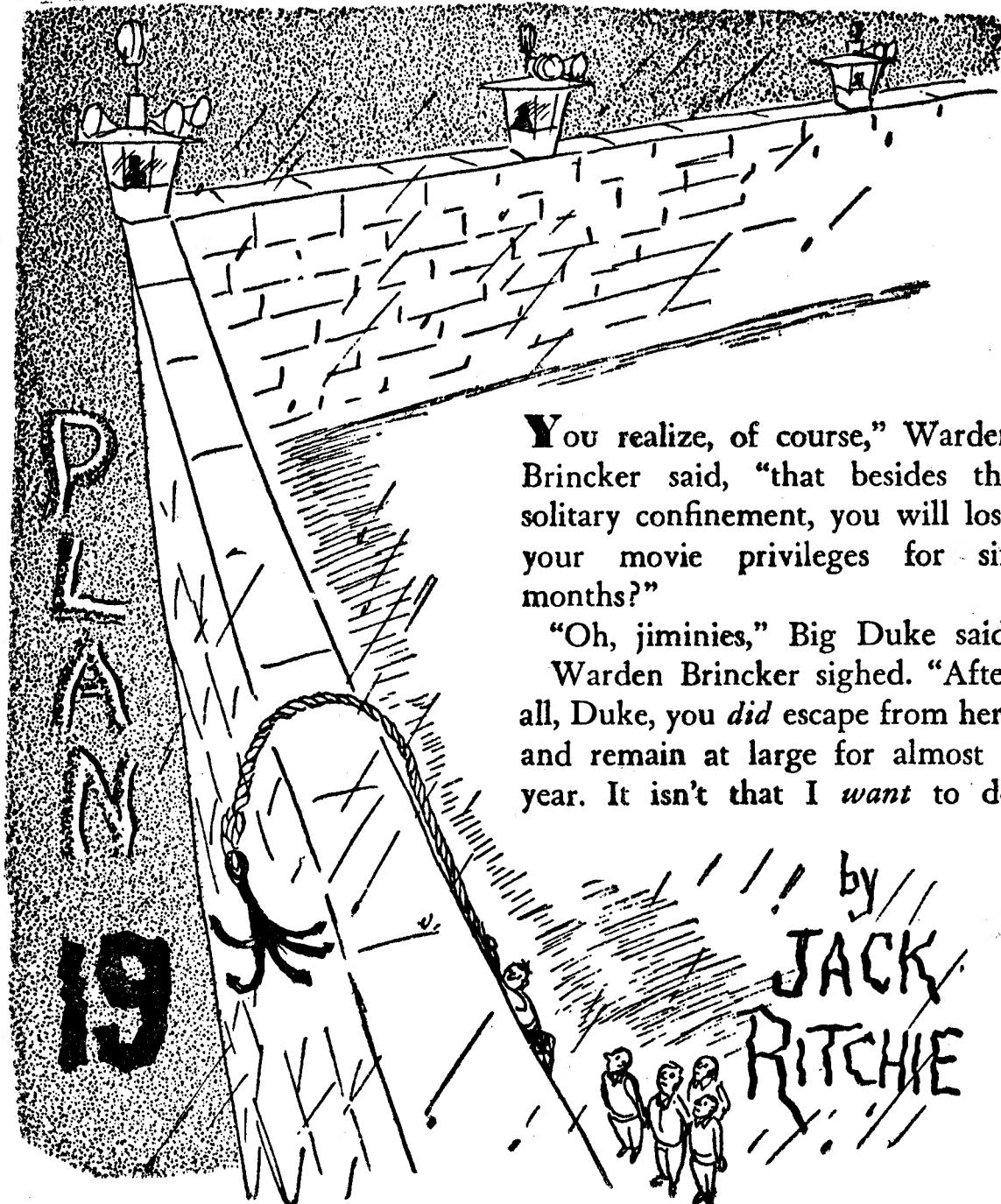
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Freedom may be envisaged as "flying wild and free," yet confrontation may impel introspection.



PLAN 19

77

these things, but regulations are regulations."

"Sure, sure," Duke said. "No hard feelings."

"I'm glad you're not bitter," Brincker said. "I want you to realize that it's nothing personal."

Big Duke looked at the ceiling.

Warden Brincker turned to me briefly. "Would you hand me Duke's file, Fred?"

"Yes, sir," I said.

Eleven months before, Big Duke and four of his buddies had broken out of our prison. Big Duke was the only one who had been picked up so far. In San Francisco he'd made the mistake of getting himself arrested for assault and battery. When the police there ran a routine check on his fingerprints, the truth came out and he had been returned.

The warden's intercom buzzed and he flipped the switch. "Yes?"

"The medical officer wants to talk to you about some requisitions," the voice from the box said.

"I'm busy right now," Brincker said. But then he thought it over. "Okay, I'll be right out."

He left the office to Big Duke, the guard, and me.

Big Duke looked me over. "I'll swear the con suit you got on is tailor-made."

I straightened a few papers on my desk. "I have a few friends in

the tailor shop and they do me favors occasionally."

"How do you steer it through the laundry and get it back again? Don't a neat suit like that stand a good chance of sort of accidentally getting lost?"

I brushed a few eraser crumbs to the floor. "I have a few friends in the laundry too."

Big Duke laughed. "A real operator, huh? You old-timers got it made. How long you been in here?"

"Twenty-two years," I said.

"How long you got to go?"

"Some time yet. The sentence was 199 years."

"Ever think about breaking out?"

I glanced at the guard for a moment. "Who doesn't?"

Warden Brincker came back. "Now, Duke, we want to get a few things straightened out, for the record—like your escape from here."

Big Duke shrugged. "Sure."

"Apparently it was quite simple? You merely attached a home-fashioned grappling iron to one end of a rope, tossed it over the wall, and then the five of you climbed up and over?"

"That's the way it went," Big Duke said.

Brincker frowned. "Naturally we re-created the entire episode after we found the grapple. It is true

there is a *blank* spot, so to speak, at that particular point so that the guards in the nearest two towers cannot see the *foot* of the wall. However the *top* of the wall is in plain view from both towers, and the guards swear they didn't see the five of you go over."

"You forget it was raining cats and dogs," Big Duke said. He patted his shirt pocket, probably looking for a cigarette, but there weren't any. "And besides, your guards are human, aren't they?"

"Well . . . yes."

"So are they really going to stand there with their eyes moving 180 degrees, back and forth, back and forth, all the time? No. They'll look in one direction for a while and maybe start to daydream. So we watched for that to happen and when it did, we tossed up our rope and pulled ourselves out."

The warden rubbed his neck. "Of course that's possible, and it *did* happen, but I still think that you were incredibly lucky."

Big Duke grinned. "That's what life is, a lot of luck."

After Duke had been taken away, the warden sighed. "I suppose I'm too sensitive, but I always seem to take it personally when one of my boys escapes." He reached into his desk humidor for a cigar. "Don't I try to run a happy ship, Fred?"

"Yes, sir," I said. "You've received any number of awards and citations from your colleagues in the field. And didn't you receive an honorary Doctor of Laws degree from West Colorado Agriculture and Mining last week?"

"I know. But I think the real measure of my success should be gauged by the way the men feel about me *in here*."

"All of us respect you, sir," I said. "We know you have our interests at heart."

He nodded. "I can go anywhere I want in this prison unarmed. I don't even have to have a guard accompany me. I'm perfectly safe, in the shops, in the yard, and even in the darkness of the movie theater."

"Yes, sir," I said. "The men realize and appreciate the fact that you show nothing but first run movies here. What are we having tonight, sir?"

"*Mary Poppins*," Brincker said. "Except for the bean."

I put Duke's files back into the filing cabinet. "Bean? What bean, sir?"

"In the prison theater," Brincker said. "When the lights go out, somebody invariably throws a bean at me. I know it's a bean because one of them missed my head once and bounced off the seat in front of me and right back into my lap. Fred,

somebody out there doesn't like me."

"There's one rotten apple in every barrel, sir," I said.

Brincker agreed. "We've got to face the fact that the world isn't perfect."

That evening in the messhall, the menu consisted of meat loaf, stewed tomatoes, canned peaches, coffee, and bread. When I first came here I did not much care for stewed tomatoes, but now I'm getting rather fond of them.

After we were locked in our cells for the night, Hector, my cellmate, hung up his cap. "Another day, another dollar." He used a plastic drinking cup to water the pot of petunias.

I took off my shoes and slipped into moccasins. "Big Duke came back today. He says they really got over the wall just by throwing that grapple."

Hector shook his head. "Very unscientific."

I agreed. "We'll never do anything as primitive as that when our time comes."

We had one of the outside cells of the tier and Hector looked up at the darkening day. "Snow flurries again."

I nodded. "Spring is late this year."

Hector squinted at a wedge of geese crossing the sky. "This is

the time of the year when it gets me most, when I see the geese flying wild and free and winging their way south."

"Hector," I said, "I believe they go north in spring."

"Well, whichever way it is," Hector said. "When I see them flying wild and free and winging their way, it really depresses me. Being in a cage like this, I mean."

"Don't let it wear you down, Hector," I said. "We'll be out of here before long, or I miss my guess."

He pulled down the small shade. "You're right, Fred. And I think Plan No. 18 is the answer."

"I'm positive it is," I said. "The trouble with the other seventeen is that they depend too much on specific conditions. Everything has to be just exactly right and we haven't been lucky in that respect."

"Right," Hector said. "But I'm positive we finally hit it with Plan 18. It's straightforward and simple. No tricky variables."

At the end of May, Big Duke got out of solitary, and Warden Brincker saw him again.

Brincker has eliminated the darkness, bread-and-water routine from solitary. You now have light, you receive a balanced diet, except there is no dessert, and you are limited to two library books and one magazine a week. A lot of the old-

timers feel that solitary just isn't solitary any more and something has passed from this world.

Big Duke looked well and rested.

"How are you, Duke?" Brincker asked.

"Just dandy. When do I get back to my job in the woodworking shop?"

"Well, now, Duke," Brincker said, "I'm afraid things aren't quite that simple. There are rules and regulations, you know. First, of course, you'll have to put in six months in the laundry. That's standard procedure for all newcomers, and since your escape and return, you fall into the newcomer category."

"Sure, sure," Duke said. "Six months in the laundry. And then I get back into the woodworking shop?"

Brincker smiled apologetically. "There are priorities and seniorities to consider too, Duke. After your tour of duty in the laundry, you are placed on the Open List. The labor pool, in other words. This means that we assign you to wherever your services are needed and the places will undoubtedly change from time to time. Only after two years in the Open List are you allowed a choice of jobs."

Duke didn't look at all happy. "Two and a half years in all?"

Brincker nodded. "And even then I couldn't *guarantee* there'll be an opening in the woodworking shop. I understand that most of the men working there now are with us rather permanently."

Brincker had Big Duke's file on his desk and he turned over a few pages. "Frankly, Duke, I don't see why you're so anxious to get back into the woodworking shop."

Duke's eyes flickered. "What do you mean?"

"According to your General and Mechanical Aptitude Test score and its interpretation by our new computer, we feel that you would be much happier in the electric shop."

Duke's eyes drifted toward the window. "I don't give a damn what the machine says. I like woodworking."

Three weeks later Duke appeared in the warden's office again, this time because he'd been put on report for forging a pass and attempting to get into the woodworking shop.

Warden Brincker clicked his tongue. "Frankly, Duke, I'm a bit disappointed in you. Forging a pass is a rather serious thing."

Duke didn't look particularly contrite. "I just wanted to see the old place again."

The warden's phone buzzed and he picked it off the cradle and listened. He turned to me. "It's

the Personnel Section. Who was it you recommended for that library job?"

"Peterson, sir."

"Are you sure he can handle the job?"

"Yes, sir. He's a good worker."

Brincker resumed his conversation with Personnel and okayed the transfer of Peterson from the hemp shop to the library.

When Brincker hung up, he faced Duke again. "I'm sorry, Duke, but I'm afraid it's back to solitary for you."

That didn't seem to bother Duke too much, or if it did, he didn't show it. He studied me for a few seconds before he turned and preceded the guard out of the office.

Late in June, our baseball season started with the opener against Wickman Penitentiary. Hector and I were seated in our favorite section along the first base line, when I noticed Big Duke get up from his seat and work his way toward us. He sat down beside me and watched the next play.

The Wickman batter reached for a slider and rapped it deep into the hole. Leoni, our shortstop, fielded it cleanly and made the long throw to get the runner at first.

Duke took the toothpick out of his mouth. "Nice throw."

I nodded. "Leoni's got a good arm and he's going to be with us

for a while, a good long stretch."

Duke looked at me. "You got a lot of influence around here, ain't that right?"

"We got a good chance of keeping the pennant for the next couple of years," I said, "if we can just keep the team together."

"What did it take to get Peterson transferred from the hemp shop to the library?"

"Peterson really deserved the job," I said. "And the warden respects my judgment, I guess."

Duke worked on the toothpick again. "What's the going rate? I mean what changes hands? Like money?"

Hector had been listening. "Which Peterson is he talking about, Fred? The one that made them hand-tooled wallets that you sold to the visitors for a sixty percent commission?"

Duke smiled. "I don't have any money, and I'm not too handy with leatherwork. But maybe I got something you might like, and that's a way to get out of here."

"Me and Fred been cellmates for fifteen years," Hector said, "and we worked up eighteen foolproof, absolutely perfect methods of escape."

Big Duke grunted. "So how come you're still in here?"

"Well, the thing is that we got to first have exact conditions," Hec-

tor said. "Like in six of our plans, for instance, it has to be raining."

"It never rained here?" Big Duke asked.

"Well, sure," Hector said. "But it has to rain in the *afternoon*. On a legal holiday."

Duke flicked away the toothpick. "In fifteen years it never rained on the afternoon of a legal holiday?"

Hector nodded. "But the legal holiday has to be on a Friday so that we have a long weekend. That's very important, or the whole plan collapses. Once it rained on the afternoon of a legal holiday, but it was a Thursday. That's the closest we ever got."

Big Duke grinned slowly. "Any tunnels on your list?"

"We got two," Hector said. "But besides getting them dug, it would have to be a night without a moon and the temperature . . ."

"That's enough, Hector," I said. "We don't want to give away all our secrets."

Duke turned his attention exclusively to me. "I can get you out of here, and you don't have to wait for rain or a legal holiday or the right temperature."

I smiled. "By throwing a grapple over the wall?" I shook my head. "That's not for me."

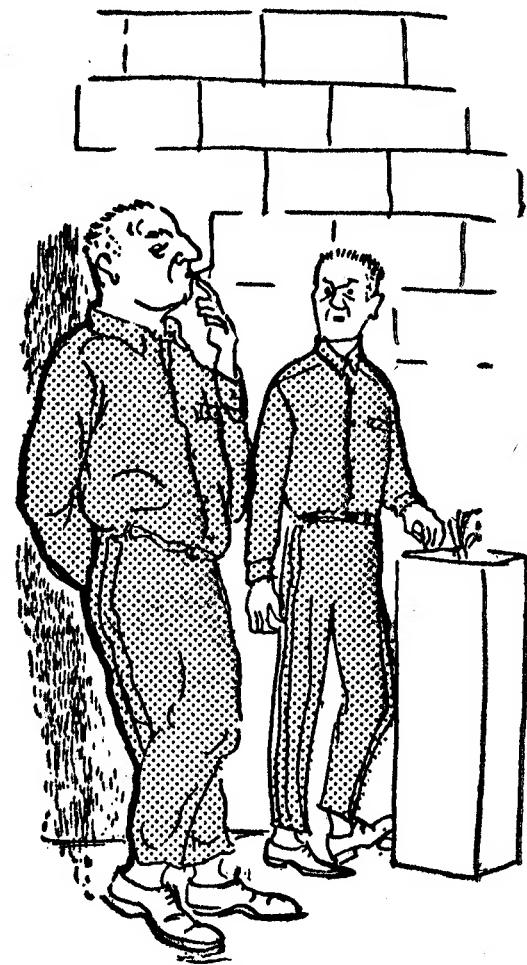
"The hell with the grapple," Big Duke said. "That was window

dressing, a big red herring."

I studied him for a few seconds and then turned to Hector. "I'm a little thirsty so I'm going to the bubbler for a drink of water. Keep your eye on the game and tell me what happened when I get back."

"You can depend on me," Hector said.

I sidled along the seats to the aisle and went down the wooden stand to the bubbler. Big Duke followed. I had my drink and moved to a relatively isolated spot



beside one of the stands. Duke drank too and then joined me.

We watched a pop fly caught in the infield. Then Duke spoke again. "The five of us worked six months on the tunnel, a real work of art, with shoring the whole length, and even a string of electric lights. We got to feeling proud of the job and that set us to thinking—why should anybody else know about the tunnel at all? Even after our escape? Suppose we were caught later and shipped back here? Why couldn't we use the same tunnel *again* to get out? So before we made our break, we arranged to have the grapple and rope hanging on the wall to make it look like that was the way we really got out."

I thought about that. "I suppose the tunnel starts somewhere in the woodworking shop?"

Duke nodded. "You get me transferred there, and we can both get out of here."

My eyes followed a line drive single to left. "Getting you transferred to the woodworking shop will take a lot of doing. I don't think I could swing it in less than a year."

"Then forget the transfer," Duke snapped. "Get me a pass. All I need is about five minutes and I'm gone."

The tunnel probably started from

the lumber supply room, I thought. That seemed the most logical place.

Duke seemed to read my mind. "The tunnel's in the woodworking shop, like I said, but it don't have signs pointing to it. I'm the only one in here who knows exactly where it is and how to get to it. If anybody decides to use it, he'll have to take me along."

"I'm not trying to monopolize your tunnel," I said. "When I go, you go. And vice versa."

Duke was satisfied. "All right. The sooner you get us the pass, the sooner we get out."

"Not so fast, Duke," I said. "If we're going to do any escaping, we're going to go about it in the right way. And the right way will take at least another month, possibly two. I've got to get things organized."

"So what's to organize? We just crawl through."

"And start running in our nice little gray suits?" I shook my head. "You and the others were lucky you got away with it the last time, but I don't intend to depend on luck. I think it might help considerably if we were wearing civilian clothes when we leave here, and have wallets with legitimate-looking identification papers."

Duke accepted that, but then he thought of something else. "Just you and me make this break? No-

body else?" he said quizzically.

"We take Hector along," I said.

Duke's eyes narrowed. "If you tell him about this everybody inside the walls will know about it in a week."

"I don't intend to tell him anything at all," I said. "Until the last minute."

During the next few days I had talks with my friends in the tailor and printing shops, and they promised to see what they could do.

It was almost three months later, however, before I deemed everything ready for our escape.

Warden Brincker left the office at one-thirty that afternoon. He was due to attend a conference in the city and would not return until early in the evening.

At the window, I watched his car pass through the gates and then went to his desk. I made out a Class A pass for myself, two limited passes for Hector and Big Duke, and two Request Forms. Through the course of years—with Brincker's permission—I'd signed his name to so many passes and other papers that should a signature ever be questioned, it would probably be Brincker's own.

I found Hector in the prison vegetable garden, hoeing around cabbages. The guard in charge of his detail didn't bother to look at my pass, but he did glance at the

Request Form that I handed him.

"So the warden's own garden needs weeding and he wants a man to do it?"

I nodded. "I think Hector will do."

Hector seemed pleased as we walked away. "Weeding the warden's garden is a pretty important job."

I waited until we turned a corner and then stopped. "Hector, we're getting out of this prison right now."

He blinked and his mouth opened slightly. "You mean *escape*?"

"That's right, Hector. The time has finally come."

Hector looked up at the sky a bit uncertainly. "Well, it *does* look like it's going to rain, and the temperature is about right, but it isn't a legal . . ."

"Never mind about that now, Hector," I said. "Just listen." I handed him a pass. "I want you to go to the woodworking shop. Use the C Street entrance. Ed Berger is on guard there. Even if he doesn't ask you, just mention that you're going to see the civilian superintendent in the furniture section about a table the warden's having refinished and that since it's at the other end of the building, you'll be leaving by the D Street exit."

"Why should I do that, Fred?"

"So that Berger won't come looking for you when you don't come back out his way. Now, Hector, once you're inside the wood-working shop, find the lumber storage room, and when nobody's looking, you slip inside, find yourself some place to hide, and wait."

"All right, Fred," he said. "I'll do like you say."

It was beginning to drizzle now. Hector pulled his cap down over his forehead and shuffled off.

I had no difficulty in extracting Big Duke from his job at the laundry.

We stopped at the prison tailor shop to pick up the three packages Elmer Henning, the Chief Inmate Tailor, had stored away for us. They contained our civilian clothes, wallets, identification papers, and even some money.

At the woodworking shop, Berger regarded the boxes we carried with only faint interest. "What's inside, Fred?"

"Upholstery fabric," I said. "The warden's wife is having a davenport and some chairs re-done."

When Duke and I managed to slip unseen into the lumber storage room, Hector came out of hiding.

My eyes went about the large room with its stacks of raw lumber. "I suppose your tunnel begins

under one of these piles of boards?" I shook my head. "Really, Duke, I don't see how you got away with it at all. Surely one of the routine inspections by the guards should have turned it up."

Duke grinned and climbed up to the top of one of the stacks. "The best place to start a tunnel is in the ceiling."

He pressed at two of the plastic-board sections with his fingertips, and a rectangular section of the ceiling flipped back.

Hector and I lost no time in joining Duke atop the lumber.

"This wing is over a hundred years old," Duke said, "and the walls are solid brick. When they electrified and installed steam pipes, they had to run the cables and pipes out in the open. To make things look neat after they were through, they covered up the mess with a false ceiling."

Duke pulled himself up into the hole. He took the packages we handed up, and then helped Hector and me join him. Once we were all in the crawl space, Duke replaced the section of ceiling. There was complete darkness for a few moments until Duke turned on a bare electric light bulb.

On hands and knees, we followed him to the thick wall. Duke and his friends had burrowed into it and down—much like coring

an apple. We descended to a small room beneath the foundations of the building. They had used it as a storage area for their materials, and it was the point from which they had begun the tunnel proper. They had painstakingly scooped away dirt and carried it back up to the false ceiling for storage.

We rested inside the small room for a few moments. "The tunnel goes under the walls and comes out in a little gully just outside the walls," Duke said. "Once we get out, we just follow the gully for a hundred yards or so to the woods, and then we're on our way."

Staring at the hole before us, I voiced some claustrophobic misgivings, but Duke reassured me. "There's a light bulb burning every thirty feet and for a tunnel, it's pretty roomy. No actual belly-crawling."

Duke got on his hands and knees

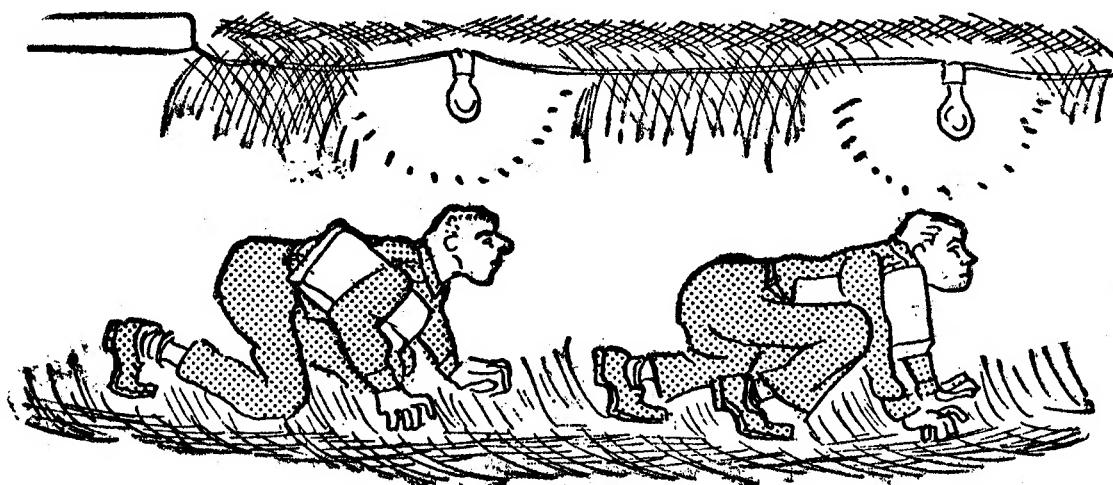
again, and pushing one of our boxes in front of him, disappeared into the opening. I followed and Hector came at my heels.

The time spent crawling seemed interminable, especially during those periods when Duke's form blocked out the burning bulb ahead, and Hector's body did the same for the one behind.

Eventually, however, I smelled sweet, rain-fresh air, and emerged into the open. Hector appeared close behind me. We were indeed in what could be called a gully and its over-hanging lip shielded us from the sight of the guards on the wall, and the drizzling rain.

Duke re-covered our exit with brush. "Who knows, someday maybe we'll be using the tunnel again."

When he finished, Hector and I followed him along the muddy bottom. By the time we reached the sanctuary of the woods, it was raining fairly steadily.



Duke took shelter under a large pine and ripped open the box he carried. "I hope there's a raincoat."

"Of course," I said. "I think of everything."

Duke managed to make the transition to civilian attire in less than two minutes.

He snapped down the brim of his hat, turned up the collar of the raincoat, and grinned. "All right, boys, from here on everybody's on his own." He waved a hand and disappeared into the driving rain.

Hector was having a little trouble buttoning his shirt. "Are you sure these things fit, Fred?"

"Of course. You were measured, weren't you?"

He wiped some water off his face with a sleeve. "It's raining."

"Of course it's raining," I said. "I can see that much."

"I mean it's cold."

"So it's raining and it's cold," I snapped. "Put on your raincoat and

hat, and stop your grumbling."

He did as he was told. "I didn't expect it would be this way."

"What way?"

"Raining and cold," Hector said. "And windy. Awfully windy."

I was ready to go now. "All right, Hector, let's move on."

I took about a dozen steps before I realized he wasn't following me. I turned.

Hector stood where I'd left him. The hat was on his head, but he still clutched his prison cap.

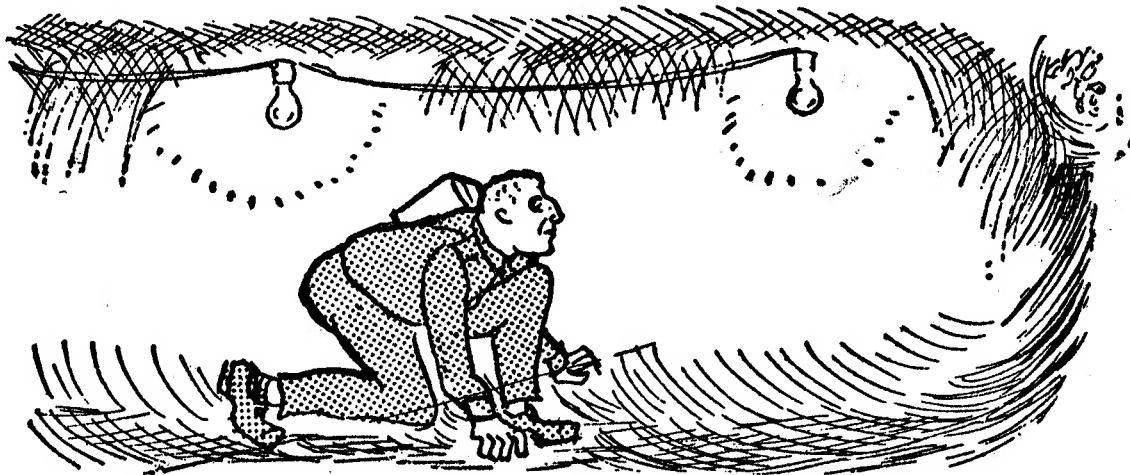
"Damn it, Hector," I said. "Come on."

He didn't move.

I went back to him and tried to take the cap from him, but he clung to it. He stared straight ahead, his eyes wide.

"Hector!" I shouted. "What's the matter with you?"

His lips moved. "They're having sweet potatoes for supper tonight, Fred. I've always liked sweet po-



tatoes. Don't have them often."

The wind gusted suddenly, and I turned to face it. Ahead of me, a solid sheet of cold rain hid the world I'd left twenty-two years before.

What was it really like now?

I shook Hector's shoulder. "There's nothing to be afraid of out there. No lions. No tigers. Just people. What can people do to you?"

He looked at me. "Everything," he said. "Everything."

After supper in the messhall, Hector and I joined the formation marching to the movie theater. We filed in to our regular seats.

"Do you think they'll find the tunnel?" Hector asked.

"I don't know," I said. "But they still don't know how Big Duke escaped."

"We won't get into any trouble, will we?"

"No. I'll manage to cover up for us. I have a little influence in here."

"Maybe a whole lot, Fred," Hector said. "You're a pretty impor-

tant man. You can fix it, Fred."

I smiled slightly. Yes, in here I was a pretty important man. Out there I would be nothing.

"The real reason I decided to crawl back," Hector said, "is because it wasn't right. Using somebody else's tunnel, I mean. Not one that we dug ourselves."

"Sure," I said. "That's the way I feel about it."

"I just thought of another plan," Hector said. "I'm going to call it Plan 19."

"Catchy title," I said, but without malice.

"Basically it's simple," Hector said. "Very simple. But it needs a little work."

The house lights went out and the newsreel began.

I searched for a familiar silhouette and then took the bean blower out of my pocket. I put a bean into my mouth and blew.

"Did you get him?" Hector asked.

"Dead center," I said.

I eased the laces of my shoes and relaxed. It was good to be back where I belonged.

